

imagine  
all the  
people

# Haitian *immigrants in Boston*

CITY OF BOSTON  
Thomas M. Menino  
Mayor

*New Bostonian Series*

March 2007

## imagine all the people: Haitian immigrants in Boston

The main destinations of Haitian immigrants are the Dominican Republic (where an estimated 600,000 Haitian-born immigrants reside) and the United States (with 419,317 Haitian-born immigrants, according to the 2000 Census)<sup>1</sup> Canada is another popular destination, especially the French-speaking Province of Quebec.

The origin of the Haitian community in Massachusetts goes back to the late fifties and the early sixties when some Haitians fled the dictatorial regime of François Duvalier (Papa Doc). Massachusetts has the third largest Haitian community in the United States, after Florida and New York. According to a 2005 MassInc report there are an estimated 40,000 Haitians living in Massachusetts today.<sup>2</sup>

Boston's Haitian-born immigrants settled in various parts of Boston, with the highest concentrations in Mattapan, along Blue Hill Avenue, as well as Roxbury, Dorchester, and Hyde Park.

Many Haitians settled in Boston during the seventies, but during the housing boom of the eighties and the early nineties, they relocated to the suburbs. Today, it is not uncommon to find pockets of Haitians scattered throughout the South Shore and areas of Lawrence, Lowell, Framingham and Worcester.

It is commonly argued that the first wave of Haitian immigrants moved temporarily to seek educational opportunities and shelter themselves from economic duress and political oppression in their home country. Raising a family in the United States has led many to adjust to the reality of providing for their immediate family, as well as supporting their relatives in Haiti.

Over the past thirty years, Haitians have played a collective role in the social, cultural and economic life of Massachusetts. They are very active in their churches and



have started or joined numerous civic, social, or health organizations. A number of well-established, non-profit agencies and professional organizations provide services that address a wide range of issues including advocacy, health, domestic violence, education, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, immigration status, and housing. In addition, more than 20 radio and television programs, and one print media offer educational programs and political news in Creole, French and English.

Individually, Haitians have made inroads in the professional arena, with many now working in high profile positions in academic circles, as either faculty or in Haitian student associations. Haitians also hold positions in the local police force, the health and public health fields and in the business, banking, and legal professions. A vibrant small business community offers a variety of goods and services.

Since the late 1990s, Haitians have become more visible in the political fabric of Massachusetts, organizing themselves in ad hoc committees that promote voters' education and participation. As a result, two State Representatives of Haitian descent have been elected in the Massachusetts legislature since 2000, and more Haitians are actively pursuing elected offices in various other states.

## imagine

*One in four  
Haitians in  
Boston are  
between  
the ages of  
20 and 34.*

## population share

Florida (with an estimated 43% of the population) and New York (with 30%) are the most popular states for Haitian-born immigrants living in the United States. Massachusetts and New Jersey (both with 8%) rank third. Together, these four states account for 89% of the total foreign-born<sup>3</sup> population from Haiti in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

According to the 2000 Census, there are 43,819 Haitian-born immigrants living in the Boston area Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA).<sup>5</sup>

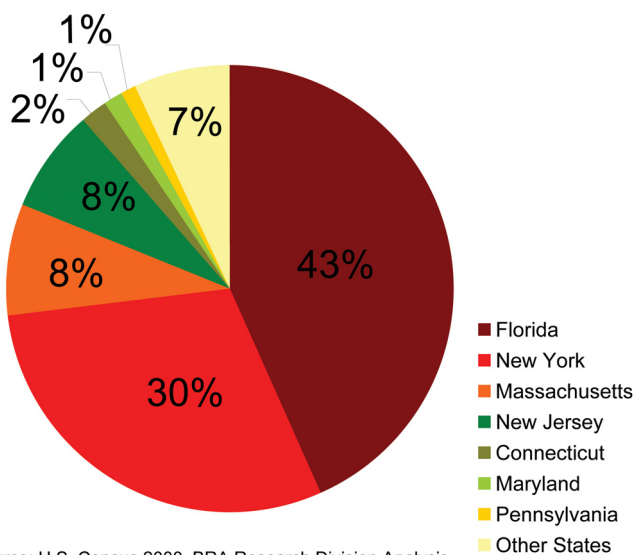
There are an estimated 18,887 Haitian-born immigrants living in the

city of Boston.<sup>6</sup> According to the 2000 Census, Haitians make up the largest share of immigrants in Boston, with 10%, followed by the Dominican Republic (8%) and Chinese (7%).<sup>7</sup>

Forty-two percent of Haitian immigrants in Boston are male. Fifty-eight percent are female. More than half of Haitian immigrants are or have been married. Almost one-quarter are between the ages of 20 and 34 and over 60 percent are 35 years of age or older. Thirty-nine percent of Haitian residents are U.S. citizens by naturalization.



Share of Haitian Population by State



Source: U.S. Census 2000, BRA Research Division Analysis

## educational attainment

Thirty-five percent of Haitians in Boston have not completed high school, a figure comparable to that of all foreign-born (34%) and twice that of the native-born (16%) population. One-quarter have received a high school diploma, a figure slightly higher than that of all foreign-born and matching that of the native-born.

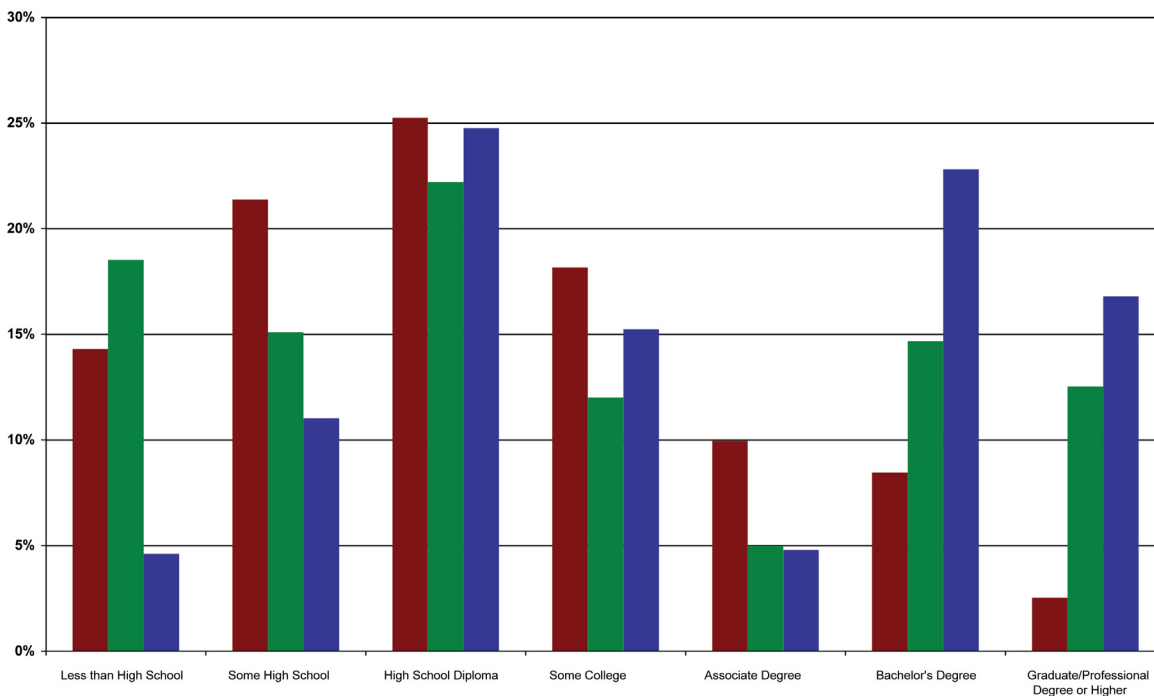
While 28% of Haitian immigrants have received some college education, only 8% hold a Bachelor's degree, compared to 15% for all foreign-born and 23% of all native-born. Only 3% hold a graduate or professional degree, compared to 13% of all foreign-born and 17% of the native-born.



*One in four  
Haitians hold  
a high school  
diploma, a figure  
higher than that  
of all foreign-born  
and slightly higher  
than that of the  
native-born  
population.*

**Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Older**

■ Haitians ■ Foreign-Born ■ Native-Born



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division



## occupations

More than one-third (35%) of Haitian immigrants living in Boston are employed in technical, sales and administrative support occupations. More than twenty percent (21%) are employed in both the managerial and professional occupations, and the service occupations category.

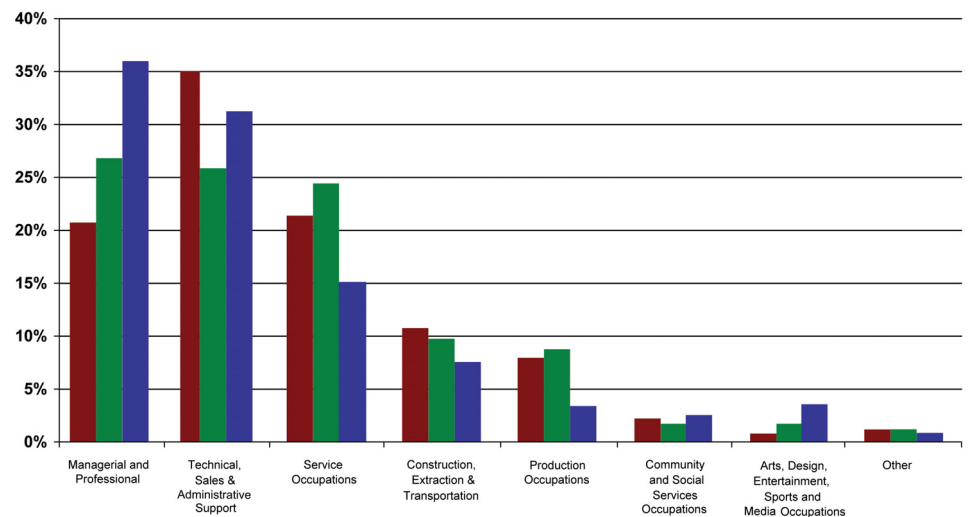
Haitian immigrants are over-represented in technical, sales and administrative support (31%). This high participation in the support occupations is mostly driven by health care. Twenty percent of Haitians are employed in the health care support

occupations, most of which are registered nurses, compared to 5% of all foreign-born and 2% of the native-born population.<sup>8</sup> In the construction, extraction and transportation occupations, representation of the Haitian population (11%) is consistent with all foreign-born (10%) but higher than the native-born (7.6%).

Haitians are under-represented in managerial and professional occupations, compared to all foreign-born (24%) and native-born (36%). A somewhat lower percentage of Haitian immigrants are



**Occupations for Population 25 Years and Older** ■ Haitians ■ Foreign-Born ■ Native-Born



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sam le BRA Research



## self-employed

employed in service occupations than the average for all foreign-born (24%), but a higher percentage than the native-born (15%).

Fifty-nine percent of Haitian immigrants participate in the labor force. This figure is almost identical to the 60% of all foreign-born participating in the labor force and lower than that of the native-born population (64%).<sup>9</sup>

The unemployment rate among Haitian-born immigrants in Boston is estimated at 8%, compared to a 7% unemployment rate for all foreign-born and a figure of 8% for the native-born.

An estimated 71% of Haitian-born immigrants in Boston work for a private, for-profit company. Another 10 percent work for private not-for-profit organizations.

Overall, Boston's Haitian population is active in the labor market, reflected by their comparable labor force participation and unemployment rates relative to the city's foreign-born and native-born populations.

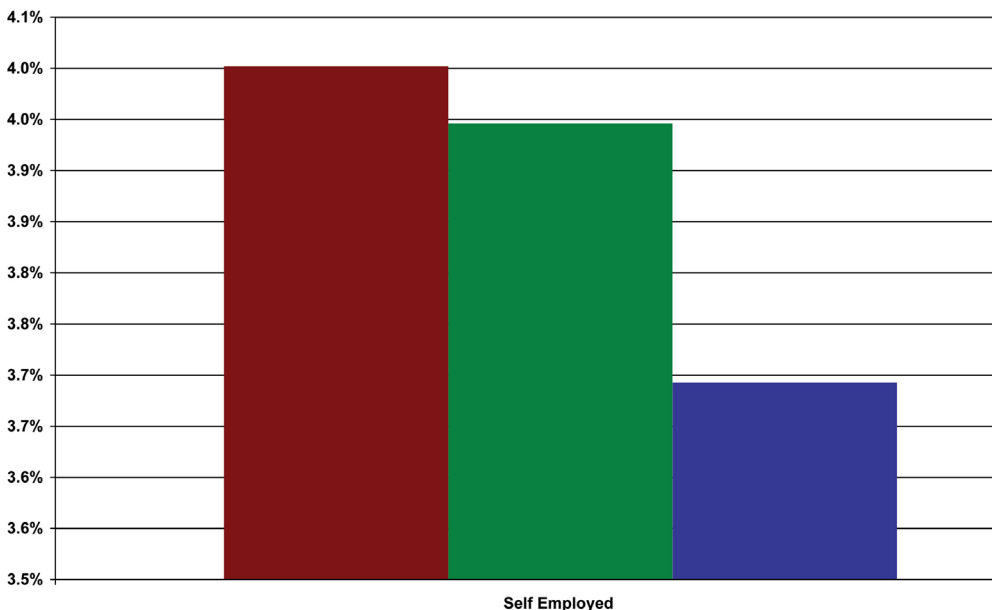
An estimated 4% of Haitian immigrants in Boston are self-employed. This compares to a rate of 3.9% for the entire foreign-born population and 3.7% for the native-born population.<sup>10</sup>



*Twenty percent of Haitians are employed in the health care support occupations, most of which are registered nurses, compared to 5% of all foreign-born and 2% of all native-born population.*

**Share of Self Employed Workers**

■ Haitians ■ Foreign-Born ■ Native-Born



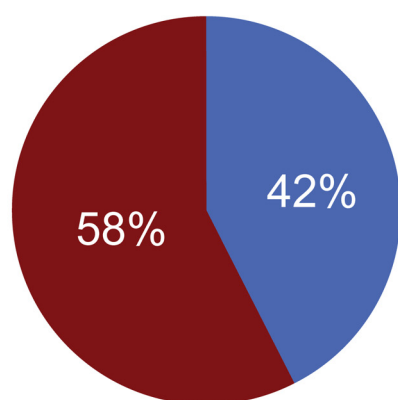
Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA

*More than 750,000  
Haitians live in  
the U.S.*

Main destinations for  
Haitian immigrants:

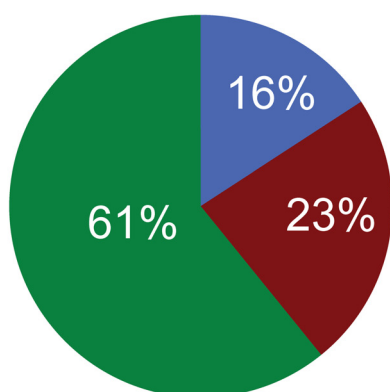
- **U.S.**
- **Cuba**
- **Dominican Republic**

## Gender



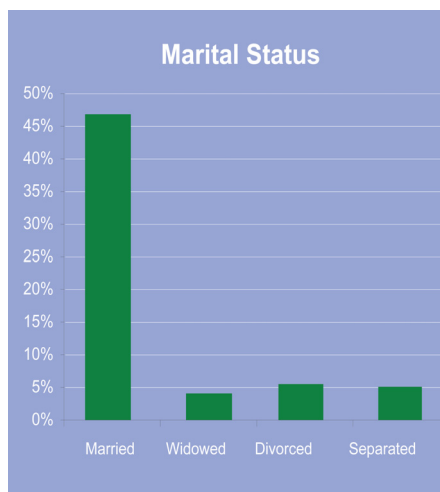
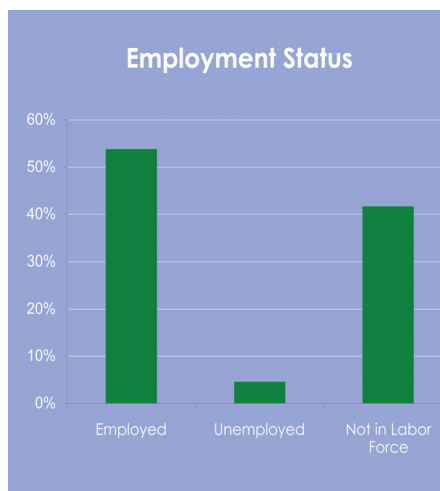
■ Male  
■ Female

## Age



■ 0-19  
■ 20-34  
■ 35+

# 18,887 Haitians in Boston



## occupations

- 35%** technical, sales and administrative support
- 21%** managerial and professional
- 21%** services
- 11%** construction, extraction and transportation
- 8%** production
- 2%** community and social services
- 1%** art, design, and media
- 1%** other

## entrepreneurship

business ownership  
**108 small businesses**

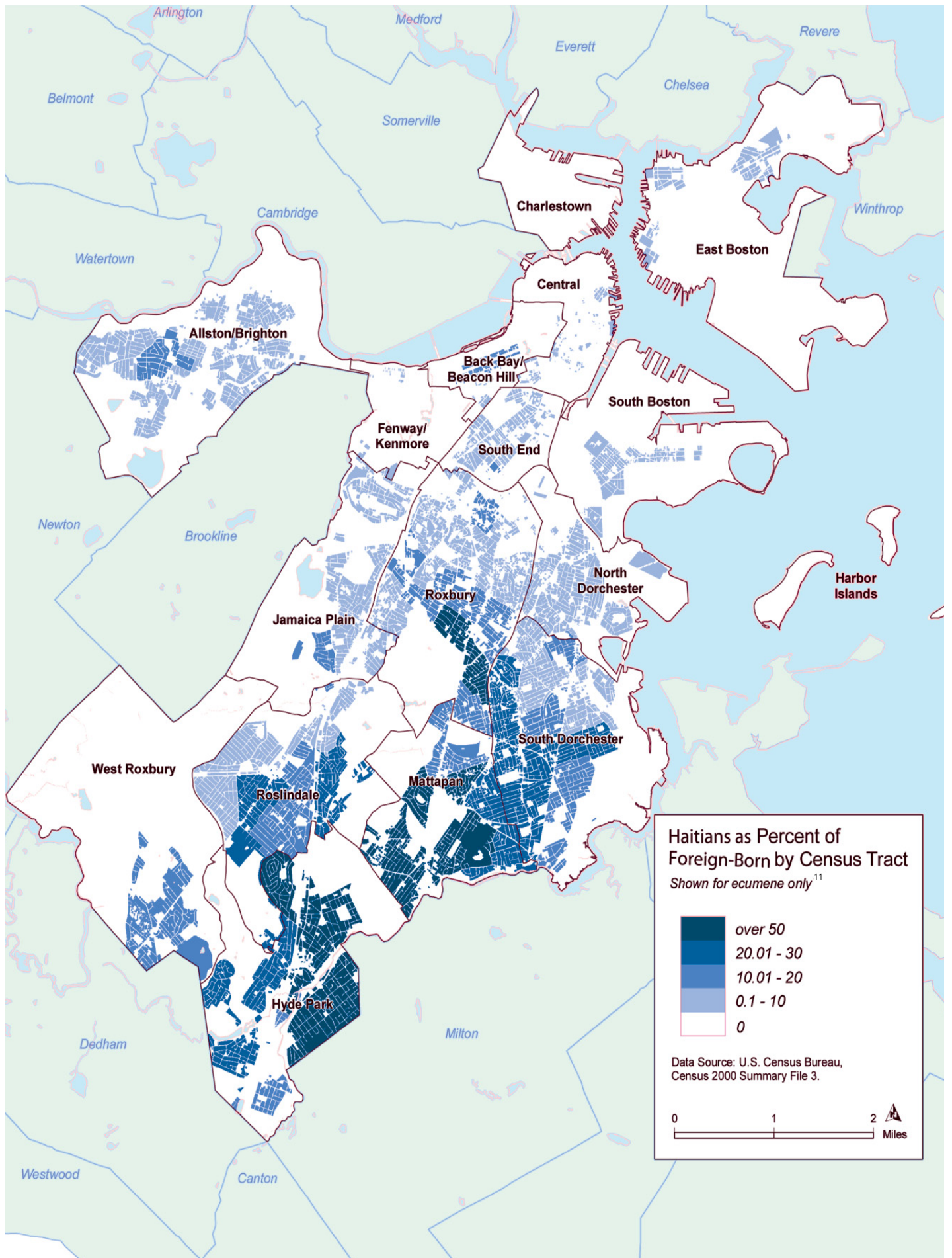
## contributing

**\$219 million**  
annual spending

**\$222 million**  
to the regional product

**\$60 million**  
in state and federal taxes

**\$1,997 indirect jobs**  
for the local economy





## spending

Haitian immigrants contribute to the local economy through their labor. The total value of their contributions is estimated using a regional economic model (REMI) that calculates the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent.

Haitian immigrants spend, from their after tax earnings, nearly \$219 million in Boston, annually.<sup>12</sup>

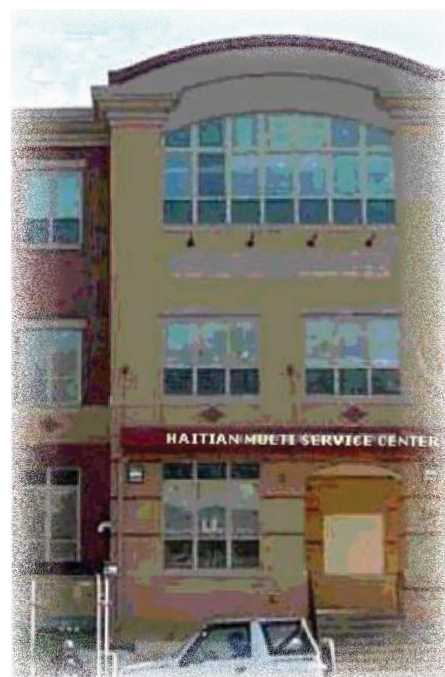
These annual expenditures generate a regional product of over \$204 million in local spending, and more than \$58 million in State and Federal taxes.<sup>13</sup> This expenditure in turn, generates 1,817 indirect jobs in the local economy.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the contribution Haitian-born immigrants make to the U.S. and the local economy, they continue to play an important role in the economy of their native country. Each year, they send an estimated \$12.6 million a year in cash remittances back to their homeland.

## entrepreneurship

Haitian-born immigrants further contribute to Boston's economy through entrepreneurship. They own 108 small businesses in the greater Boston area specializing in retail and food services among other industry sectors.

Combined, these Haitian-owned businesses employ more than 300 people and contribute over \$18 million to the regional product, \$1.2 million in State and Federal Taxes and 180 indirect jobs.



**Distribution of Education and Language Challenges<sup>15</sup> in the Haitian Population (25+)**

Group	Number	Percent of 25+
Lack diploma but No Language Challenge	1,964	15.7%
Lack diploma and have Language Challenge	2,321	18.5%
Have a diploma but have limited English-speaking skills	951	7.6%
<b>Total Haitian population (25+) that either lacks high school diploma or has limited English-speaking skills</b>	<b>5,236</b>	<b>41.8%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division Analysis

## standard of living

Only 16 percent of Haitians have achieved a middle class standard of living<sup>16</sup>, compared to 46% of Boston's native-born population and 28% of all adult foreign-born.

A combination of factors may contribute to Haitians low standard of living. One is the low educational attainment levels and lack of English proficiency among many Haitians, as seen in the table above. While 37.9% of Boston's adult foreign-born population either lacks a high school diploma or has limited English-speaking skills, the rate of Haitian-born adults are somewhat higher, at 41.8%.

As the table below illustrates, among those with masters degrees or higher, Haitians have a much lower return on education than both native-born and foreign-born. Of those who maintain a middle-class standard of living, only 16% of Haitian-born immigrants in Boston hold a master's degree or higher, compared to 56% of the entire foreign-born population and 75% of the native-born population. Part of the problem for Haitians, as it is for other foreign-born immigrants, is the lack of recognition given in the U.S. to foreign educational qualifications. This is

particularly true in professional occupations where official recognition and/or re-certification are needed.

Another barrier facing Haitians and other immigrants is the lack of general knowledge about how the local labor market works.



*Collectively,  
Haitians contribute  
\$222 million  
to the economy,  
pay \$60 million  
in taxes and  
create 1,997  
indirect jobs.*

**Educational Attainment for 20-64 Year Olds in Boston with Middle-Class Standard of Living**

Educational Attainment	Native-Born	Foreign-Born	Haitians
1-12 years, No Diploma or GED	16%	15%	22%
High School Diploma or GED	31%	22%	17%
13-15 years, No College Degree	38%	24%	13%
Associate's Degree	45%	31%	12%
Bachelor's Degree	59%	43%	11%
Masters or Higher	75%	56%	16%
All	46%	28%	16%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division Analysis



# endnotes





1 Migration Information Source  
[www.migrationinformation.org](http://www.migrationinformation.org).

2 According to MassInc, between 2000 and 2003, Haitians made up 4.7 percent of all new immigrants to Massachusetts. Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth. (2005). The Changing Face of Massachusetts.

This represents a 16% increase in the Haitian population living in Massachusetts with the total of 39,656 in 2003. Estimates vary widely with the upper boundary of 90,000 Haitians living in Massachusetts today according to Dr. Marc Prou, a visiting professor at the University of Massachusetts-Boston.

3 The "foreign-born" population includes all people who are born outside the U.S., naturalized citizens; and non-U.S. citizens. The "native-born" population includes all people born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Island Areas and persons born abroad by American parents. Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) Research Division. (2005).

4 U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

5 Haiti and the USA. [www.haiti-usa.org](http://www.haiti-usa.org)

6 According to MassInc, between 2000 and 2003, Haitians made up 4.7 percent of all new immigrants to Massachusetts. Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth. (2005). The Changing Face of Massachusetts.

This represents a 16% increase in the Haitian population living in Massachusetts. If we apply the same ratio to Boston's Haitian-born population we have a total Haitian population in Boston of 18,887.

7 New Bostonians 2005, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Research Division.

8 The technical, sales and administrative support sector consists of sales and related occupations, office and administrative support occupations and health care support occupations. (BRA Research Division)

9 Defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2005).

10 There is no agreement among researchers regarding the reasons for variations in the self-employment rates among different immigrant groups. Reasons cited include human and financial capital of individual immigrants, high rates of solidarity and social capital in some immigrant communities, as well as the opportunity structure encountered by immigrant entrepreneurs.

11 Ecumene: Inhabited Space, from the Greek root oixos meaning inhabited and nenon meaning space.

Census demographic mapping at Boston's Planning and Economic Development agency works at the tract and block group levels. To insure the city's land uses and population distribution are adequately reflected in the maps we make, allowances are made for water bodies, parks, and industrial zones, etc.

The population ecumene is created from the City of Boston Assessing Department parcel boundaries. Land use records from three sources (Assessing Department, Boston Redevelopment Authority, and City of Boston Parks Department) are analyzed to determine which parcels should be included. In some cases parcels are modified to better reflect reality. No new land analysis from aerial photographs or remote sensing data is done. The ecumene intersects both census and block group boundaries

resulting in data sets to which census data can be mapped. New area values for the block groups and census tracts are calculated based on the ecumene. Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). (2005). Planning Division.

12 Total gross income of Haitians totaled \$286 million in 2004. Adjustments were made for remittances assuming a monthly transfer of \$162 per household. This amount is in accordance with estimates made by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Marcuss, M. (2005). International Remittances: Information for New England Financial Institutions.

13 Haitians generate \$12 million in State income taxes, \$3.4 million in State sales taxes paid, and \$42.9 million in Federal income taxes. Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) Research Division. (2005). Regional Economic Model, Inc. (REMI) calculations.

14 BRA Research Division. (2005). REMI calculations.

15 The Language Challenge includes immigrant adults who do not speak English at all or who do not speak it well. Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth. (2005). The Changing Face of Massachusetts.

16 A family income four times the poverty line is used as a proxy for the middle-class standard of living. The actual income needed to achieve this standard depends on the number of people in the family. For a two person family the income would be at least \$44,856 which is at the 43rd percentile of all families. Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth. (2005). The Changing Face of Massachusetts.



**CITY OF BOSTON**  
Thomas M. Menino  
*Mayor*



**Boston  
Redevelopment  
Authority**

Publication: 610-3



Mayor's Office of New Bostonians (MONB)  
Cheng Imm Tan, *Director*

**Produced by the BRA Research Division**

Alvaro Lima, *Director of Research*  
Martina Toponarski  
Nanette Dyer Blake  
James Reginald Colimon (MONB)

**Map by the Digital Cartography & GIS**

Alla Ziskin

**ASSOCIATION OF HAITIAN WOMEN  
IN BOSTON (AFAB)**

330 Fuller Street  
Dorchester, MA 02124  
tel: 617.287.0096  
[www.afab-kafanm.org/](http://www.afab-kafanm.org/)

**CENTER FOR HAITIAN STUDIES INC.  
(C.H.S.)**

8260 NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue 2nd Floor  
Miami, FL 33138  
tel: 305.757.3581  
fax: 305.757.3581

**HAITIAN AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH  
INITIATIVES, INC. (HAPHI)**

10 Fairway Street  
Mattapan, MA 02126  
tel: 617.298.8076

**HAITIAN AMERICANS UNITED (HAU)**

10 Fairway Street, #218  
PO Box 260440  
Mattapan, MA 02126  
tel: 617.298.2976  
[www.hauinc.org](http://www.hauinc.org)

**HAITIAN ARTISTS ASSEMBLY (HAA)**

200 Governor's Drive #31  
Winthrop, MA 02152  
tel: 617.846.5889

**HAITIAN CONSULATE**

545 Boylston Street, Suite 201  
Boston, MA 02116  
tel: 617.266.3660

**HAITIAN HEALTH OUTREACH PROJECT/  
CAMBRIDGE HEALTH ALLIANCE**

52 Beacon Street  
Somerville, MA 02142  
tel: 617.498.2193

**HAITIAN MULTI-SERVICE CENTER/  
CATHOLIC CHARITIES**

185 Columbia Road  
Dorchester, MA 02121  
tel: 617.506.6600  
fax: 617.282.3483  
[www.ccab.org/ccab\\_haitian.htm](http://www.ccab.org/ccab_haitian.htm)

**HAITIAN NURSES ASSOCIATION (HNA)**

P.O. Box 393  
Mattapan, MA 02126  
tel: 617.265.9062